WHAT GOD HATH JOINED TOGETHER
LET NOT MAN PUT ASUNDER

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What God Hath Joined Together Let Not Man Put Asunder

A COLLECTION OF

Matrimonial Sermons and Addresses

Translated from the German

By J. F. KRUEGER

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The German Literary Board,
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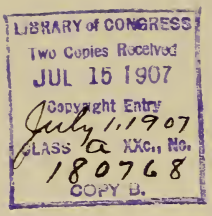

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I

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?—*Amos 3, 3.*

Beloved in the Lord: The hour has come in which you shall pledge with heart and lips matrimonial fidelity one to the other; in which the Word of God shall sanction and seal your union. This is demanded by the sanctity of matrimony, for it is the oldest of all bonds. It is the holy root of family life, planted by God Himself. It is the sacred inheritance from Paradise, through which success and happiness are transmitted to children and to children's children. It is a parable and picture of that love which unites Christ with the Church and the Church with Christ. Therefore it is very important and necessary that you do not enter upon this holy estate without the blessing of Him who is the giver of every good and perfect gift. The Word of God gives you as a motto for the journey of life, which from this hour you will take together, the words of the prophet Amos: Can two walk together, except they agree?

Blessed is the home in which husband and wife are one in faith. If they are not so blessed, worldly affections and interests unite them. But if the holiest affections, the highest interests, join them to one another, namely, Faith in the Triune God, the Father, who has created them, the Son who

has redeemed them, the Holy Ghost, who has called them to holiness and eternal life, then matrimony is a blessed picture of the Paradise which was lost, and also of the eternal and perfect union with God, which Christians are seeking.

If your hearts are one in faith, sorrow will be easier to bear, darkness be turned into light. God has helped you to bear joy and sorrow in the past, therefore continue your journey trusting in His guidance, one in faith by His grace and mercy, and you will always have the antidotes for the poison of sorrow and of death. You will always be able to say with David: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

Then you will be more and more, one in love. Beloved, not all the days of your married life will be as happy as this day, nor is it only outward affection or anxiety for health and life which will try to mar and destroy your happiness. Stealthy intruders will enter into your very hearts. The longer husband and wife live together, the better they learn to know each other, their weaknesses, peculiarities, faults, failings, shortcomings and sins. Woe unto them then, if love ceases and grows cold. Beware, for it is just at this time we ought to preserve and prove it. Then it is necessary to bear and forbear, to endure and forgive one another in love, to help one another with a loving spirit, not to become angry, embittered, or even disappointed, but with humility and gentleness, with unselfishness and ever-growing love, to

follow Him who had patience with our weakness, to help one another in crucifying the old man, to assist each other's growth in holiness of heart and life, "to press toward the mark for the prize of the higher calling of God in Christ Jesus." True, the husband is the lord of the wife, but not her tyrant; the wife subject to the husband, but not his slave. Above all, put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.

Be one in faith, in love, in hope. Like an unknown land the future lies before you. Today you take the first steps into it. But whatever hopes you may have for your future life (and may God grant that all your hopes be fulfilled so far as they are good and needful for you), do not have any other hope except that which is rooted in faith and in love. Then, whether God gives you happy, richly-blessed hours, or whether He offers you the cup of suffering, you will always experience that "They that trust in the Lord shall not slide." In joy and in sorrow the keeper of Israel will neither slumber nor sleep, and constantly you will receive abundant blessing and strength.

Therefore, enter upon this estate, one in the Lord. And if He asks you in this holy hour, warning but at the same time encouraging, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" then confess gladly and confidently (and we will join with you), "But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Amen.

II.

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God,— *1 Peter 4, 10.*

Dearly Beloved: Finally, the long-looked-for hour has arrived in which the union of your hearts shall receive the blessing of the Lord. As once, when you became betrothed, you approached your parents to ask their blessing upon your union, knowing that the blessings of the parents buildeth houses for the children,—thus today you approach the Lord, your God, to invoke his blessing, knowing that "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Should the Lord our God, of whom His beloved Son, our Saviour, said, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" should He withhold His blessing from those who ask Him? No, for He Himself has said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make an helpmeet for him." He Himself has instituted matrimony. Yes, you may rest assured that the Lord will bless you, that He will say yea and amen to the covenant of your hearts. You feel the solemnity of this hour in which you shall be united for life, and we feel it with you. You are standing on the threshold of a new epoch in your lives, which we hope, will be for you a happy one, through the grace of God.

As a servant of the Lord, I shall address a few words to you before solemnizing your union in His name. I will base my remarks on a passage of Holy Scripture found in I Peter 4:10. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

This is a solemn exhortation which imposes grave duties upon you. The apostle calls you stewards of the manifold grace of God. Each one of you has received from God gifts, powers of body and mind, which you are not to hide like the unjust steward, but which you are to use with His help, first of all in the service of one another, remembering that some day you will have to give an account of your stewardship to Him. Every human being has a distinct personality, but he who looks deeper soon recognizes that every human being needs some other one for the development of his personality. This is the plan of God, who created man for man. And he who allows himself to be guided by God in the important step of choosing a companion for life, will find the one who has been appointed for him by God. For this reason we often say that marriages are made in heaven. We trust that your marriage was made in heaven, and that the Lord has brought you together because you were created for one another. And for this reason also you should serve one another "as good stewards of the manifold grace of God," so that His gracious will may be fulfilled and your home be a home of peace and joy.

You, the husband, with manly strength and firmness should be for your wife a strong support, a safeguard through life. Full of confidence, the parents place the hand of their daughter into yours, entrust to you the future of their child, whom they love; give to you their child that she may be yours. Honor, then, the confidence which the parents place in you. Protect your wife, serve her with the gifts which God has bestowed on you. And you, the wife, also should devote your gifts unto the service of your husband. Make home life pleasant for him, so that he will gladly return after the labor of the day is over. Cool his brow after he has borne the heat of hours of toil; gladden his heart by the love of your heart and the pleasing comforts with which a loving wife can surround her husband. If the husband must find recreation outside of his home, then the fragrance of married life is gone. You have seen the blessedness of a happy home life in the home of your parents. Prepare likewise for your husband a home to which he may gladly turn. By the will of God he has been deprived of a home for many years; let him now find what he desires; make his home happy by serving him with the gifts which the Almighty has given you.

Dearly beloved, I might say a great deal more upon this subject, how each one of you may serve the other with the gifts which he has received, but I will not enlarge on this matter. I will simply say in a general way: serve one another by giving your hearts each to the other, day after day.

The husband desires the heart of his wife, the wife longs to possess the heart of her husband. Of what value is the hand, if one does not possess the heart? The daily giving of the heart is the main requirement for a happy marriage. If husband and wife give one another their hearts day after day, then discord, dissention, and estrangement will never spring up.

The apostle demands from you mutual service in the truest and noblest sense of the word. But you know from your own experience, that he who desires to serve, must learn to rule—rule over selfishness, and the will of the natural heart. He must daily practise self-denial. However, self-denial is not a plant which grows in the soil of this world, except by the grace of the Lord, who himself practised the greatest self-denial when He gave his life on the cross as a propitiation for our sins.

The natural man can accomplish a great many things by the power of his will, but he only can truly deny himself who has consecrated his life to the Lord and Saviour, and who daily lives in His grace. Therefore I say, be rooted in Christ, and drink freely from the ever-flowing fountain of grace. Daily bow your knees before Him, and before God, your Father in Christ Jesus, and He will give you strength for self-denial and for service. And finally adopt as your motto the words of the pious Joshua, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Amen.

III.

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.—*Romans 12, 12.*

Dearly Beloved in Christ Jesus, Our Lord: The words of Holy Scripture which you have heard, "Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer," are a golden rule for every Christian, but they bear a special significance for the two who purpose to take the sacred step for which we are come together.

"Rejoicing in hope" would seem unnecessary, of course, to address these words to betrothed or newly wedded persons, for hope is generally the key-note of their souls, and it would be pathetic if it were not so. If the relation between husband and wife is what it should be, then the husband looks upon his chosen companion in life with a warm, happy hope; the wife upon the husband given to her by God, with a living hope for her innermost life, for her wants and wishes, for all her labors during this life.

It is exceedingly precious to be able to lean upon another person with a certain hope that he belongs in every respect to one's self more than to any other human being. Therefore, beloved, rejoice in this hope. Praise the Lord, because you can say as you look upon one another, "Oh, how good it is that I can rejoice in hope."

But the words of the apostle should be not only a good counsel on the wedding day, but they should be a motto for your entire life, even to the very hour of death. The contents of this passage shall not lose their value, but on the contrary, as all other Christian truths, shall grow in meaning and influence more and more the longer you live. We rejoice in hope! These words ought to be written on your hearts more clearly every year. This can be experienced only if in the last analysis we do not found our hopes upon one another, but upon Him who is our true stay in life, our assurance for the future, our Lord and our God. Why do we so frequently in our day behold marriages beginning with hope, but soon changing into an indifferent, cold living together? Because people place the hope for married life simply upon the beauty and strength of youth, amiableness, knowledge, wealth or mental gifts. With hopes so placed, one soon learning to know the other, neither can find satisfaction in the attractions of the other. Then one looks here, the other there, hoping to find satisfaction for the longing of the soul. In that moment only two alternatives offer themselves: the world around them with its worldliness, or God above them, who is also with them and in them. If they choose the first, one disappointment will soon be followed by another, and there will ensue a restless hastening from one to the other, and finally indifference and coldness—the last chapter of many marriages. Dearly beloved, I implore

you, choose the latter alternative now, namely, the God above you, in you, and with you. This is the precious, yea, the only certain guarantee of a happy marriage, that the bride and groom clasp their hands as they enter upon the holy estate of matrimony, and give each other the promise: We will always rejoice in that hope which is based upon the Lord, our God. For thus you promise that your heart and your soul will always be one.

But the apostle also continues: "Be patient in tribulation." No man, dearly beloved, treads always the flowery paths of ease. There are days when the sky is overcast with dark clouds, and the rumbling thunder is heard. Thus, also, you may expect tribulation to afflict you during your married life. What an earnest woman, christian woman on e said to me is most true: Unmarried people never experience the deepest joys of life, but they are safest from the greatest cares and bitterest sorrows. Married life is not only a happy play, but in many respects an earnest school of life.

In this school we learn to know one another. There we find out whether or not we were really in earnest when we gave the promise, to love one another until death should us part. And we pass this test if we support one another in the time of tribulation. Such patience and love are not found where the lips are stubbornly pressed together with the words, "I have to suffer this;" but they are found where

one says, "God sends me this affliction, therefore it is good for me." Where true patience is lacking, there discord enters, and discord is poison. But where true patience is found, there the heart is opened, so the husband and wife can kiss away the tears. This patience again is related to hope, for both have the same origin. And yet you can only secure and keep both, if you heed the third injunction of the apostle, "Be instant in prayer."

Prayer, it is often said, is the breath of the soul; and I would add, united prayer is the best and deepest fountain of strength in married life. You can learn to rejoice in hope, to be patient in tribulation only, if you learn to be instant in prayer, thanking the Lord for the blessings of the past, invoking His benedictions for the future.

Adopt daily devotions as the rule and habit of every-day life. Open and close each day with prayer. Do not forget in your daily life the words of the catechism: That we should acknowledge and receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. Today you stand before the altar of the Lord, and thereby you declare that as Christians you cannot live without the blessing of the Almighty. But this brief ceremony is not all. Day after day you must seek the blessing of the Almighty, and this can be done only through prayer. I know well that prayer can become a habit, and thus consist merely of words. But Christ gives us a good remedy against this when He says, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet,

and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy father who is in secret." When one is not seen or heard by any human being, one is safest against mere form or habit. Therefore, in the name of our God and Saviour, I implore you, make the closet for prayer the hallowed temple of your home. You will soon discover what a blessing for your married life is found in prayer.

Thus, then, my friends, if you desire to spend a happy married life, follow the words of the apostle, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer." Amen.

IV.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.—*Psalm 84, 11.*

You have come to the temple of the Lord to invoke the blessing of the Almighty upon you at the important step which you are about to take. Let us then hear and consider a brief word of Scripture: "For the Lord God is a sun and shield." These are two beautiful pictures which the psalmist applies to God. He calls Him a Sun and a Shield.

I. For the Lord is a sun. You can scarcely find a more beautiful or appropriate name for the living God, if you endeavor to apply human pictures and names to the Almighty. As the sun is the powerful center of the planetary system, about which all the planets circle, held in their course by the miraculous power of gravitation, so God is the Lord of all worlds, the center of all life. He keeps everything in its course, around Him everything circles. He ought to be the sun of our lives. He is the center of gravity and the stay of our spiritual activity. He is the center and strength of our lives. May he also be the sun of your home. May He keep your souls in His fellowship and His love. Look up to Him at all times, in good and evil days. He who separates himself from Him must perish, just as all creatures

must die without the life-giving rays of the sun. A home which does not regard God, the sun of righteousness, as its living and life-giving center, is wretched and miserable, even if it should possess all the treasures of the world.

The sun radiates the light which sustains life and scatters the darkness. All plants turn toward this light. Thus the eternal light of the world which radiates from God should shine into your lives. This light is found in God's word. Happy is he who walks and lives in this light, and who opens his heart to its rays. The light of grace scatters the darkness of the world which so often surrounds us. This light is a light of joy, of comfort and of peace. Blessed is the home into which it sends its bright and peaceful rays! Suffering and sorrow will often confront you in your married life, but be of good cheer, the eternal light will never lose its radiance.

The sun is also the source of all heat. Without this heat of the sun the earth would be dead and desolate. Thus the Holy Spirit who proceeds from God, the Sun of Life, should warm us with holy love. Without this love the home is desolate. But where hearts glow with true love, there blessings and joy abide, there matrimony is a source of pure happiness. It is the Lord who gives us the abundance of His divine love, true, lasting, holy love, which gladly forgets and forgives, which does good to others, which suffers long, is kind, and endureth all things. May the eternal sun of grace at all times warm and fill your home, so that you

may bless the hour in which you were united, and that the holy estate of matrimony may become for you an institution sanctified by God.

The sun, because it gives light and heat, is also the dispenser of rich blessings. God placed it in the firmament above us that it should be a source of blessing. Thus, God, the true sun, continually dispenses blessings and grace. "The Lord will withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly," the psalmist says. Those who look up to Him, who open their hearts to Him, who love and fear Him, experience His grace. May you also experience it abundantly during your married life.

II. The Lord is a shield, the psalmist continues in our text. A shield, this signifies danger and struggle. Often we are confronted by temptations from without and within. In the holy estate of marriage, poverty, sickness and suffering often darkens the sun of grace. You will experience it, as we all have experienced it. But the Lord is our shield. He covers His children with His grace and succors them with His aid. He protects us from the arrows of perdition. He graciously guards us, so that no evil befalls us.

He who wishes to experience this shielding help must always take refuge in Him. He who seeks His countenance in prayer, and trusts in Him, can at all times rest safely. For this reason David could also say in our Psalm: "O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee." There-

fore, trust in the Lord at all times. Let His word dwell richly in you. Approach Him daily in prayer, for then you also will richly experience His grace.

To you also the Lord will be a sun and shield. It rests with you whether or not you will experience the truth of these words. But I know of no better wish for you at this hour, than the words of the psalmist to which I have invited your attention. May God be your constant companion through life. May He be the sun and shield of your home. Amen.

V.

And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness —*Col. 3, 14.*

Amid the pealing of the bells and the joyous notes of the organ, you have presented yourselves before the altar of the Lord. Surrounded by relatives and friends, you have come in bridal array, while the happy and yet solemn countenances of those whom you love speak of the sincerity and earnestness of the wisnes and prayers which at this time ascend for you to the throne of the Most High. Your hearts are happy. That for which you have longed in the dreams of youth, which seems to be the climax of all joy, is now yours. And only one thing is lacking, namely, that the servant of the Lord bless the union of your hearts.

Years ago, when on the day of your confirmation you promised to be faithful unto the Lord, you knelt at this altar. Today, as then, you look upon the picture of the Crucified One, and realize the solemnity of the hour. And therefore it is only natural that you should ask the question: Lord, will we succeed? Will we be able to make one another happy?

We cannot tell you what the future has in store for you. The happiness of man rests in the hands of God. As the servant of the Lord, I can only direct you into that way in

which you may find this happiness. Therefore I call your attention to a passage of Holy Scripture: "Above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness."

You have not been led together by outward considerations, neither because of the wish of your parents, nor for the sake of gaining wealth. You have been drawn together by the love of your hearts, which told you that one could not live without the other. We rejoice whenever we behold a case of true love amid the materialistic trend of our times. You valued this love above all, and through this love you have overcome all obstacles. Lovingly now the bride clings to the husband of her choice, and surrenders herself to him with all she has and is; while the strong man embraces her, and would bear her on his hands so that she touch not the dust of earth.

But the flowers of youth fade. We cannot at all times on our journey through life tread upon roses. Sooner or later will come days of which we will say that we have no pleasure in them. When the storms of life rage, our hopes also are often wrecked. Then peace is supplanted by passion, and passion often destroys all beauty, changing even heaven into hell. Human love is often like a fire of straw, which speedily dies out and leaves nothing but ashes.

Therefore, "Put on love, which is the bond of perfectness"—that is, that kind of love which does not cease, even after beauty and youth have disappeared; which is not ex-

tinguished when the storms of life rage all around, but which rather is kindled by the winds until its flames mount to heaven, there again to find nourishment. The bond of perfectness which does not break, but unites two human hearts so that they cannot ever again be separated, is the love of Christ. Be one in Him who has loved you unto death. Live in His love, and nothing will ever be able to harm you. In Him you may suffer and die, and yet you will be happy, for in Him you will be united through all eternity. Amen.

VI.

And now, Lord, thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto thy servant:

Now therefore let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever: for thou blessest, O Lord, and it shall be blessed for ever.—*1 Chronicles 17, 26–27.*

You have come to the temple of the Lord, dearly beloved, that the church may assure you of the blessing of the Almighty for the journey the beginning of which is marked by this day. And this blessing shall not be wanting. It shall be bestowed upon you in the name of the Triune God, of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things. He who has instituted matrimony and hallowed it as a picture of His union with the church, will come to you with His blessing, through the word of Holy Scripture which the Evangelical Lutheran church, through her servant, will address to you. But before I lift up my hands to bless you, let me briefly explain to you the significance of the blessing which you desire. I shall do this by basing my remarks upon the last words of the prayer of King David, which he uttered after he had received the promise of Jehovah, that the Lord would build him a house. "And now, Lord, Thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto Thy servant: Now, therefore, let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant, that it

may be before thee forever; for Thou blessest, Lord, and it shall be blessed forever."—*I Chron.* 17:26-27.

You have begun today to build a home. Ah, how difficult this task often is. For all human ability, all worldly advantages, give us by no means the assurance that we shall succeed. "Except the Lord built the house, they labor in vain that build it." Blessed is he who knows and acknowledges this fact, for to him the Lord will give the promise which He once gave to King David: "The Lord will build thee an house." The blessing of the Lord is the only firm foundation for a newly established home. Without His blessing the home is built upon sand, even though outwardly it shines with beauty. With Him, the poorest hut is a strong palace which none can destroy and which the floods can never overthrow, for "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved, God shall help her and that right early."

This is the blessing which the Lord offers to you. Acknowledge it with grateful hearts. David had reached the climax of his life, when he received the blessing of the Lord, and answered it with the prayer: "And now, Lord, Thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto Thy servant." This is the faith upon which he stands, this the knowledge from which he proceeds: God is the source of all blessings, as for the past; so also for the future. You also, beloved, have reached the climax of your lives. And from the high

vantage ground of this day you should look backward into the past, and also forward into the future. And as you reflect upon the past, may this be the prayer of your souls: "And now, Lord, Thou art God." I do not know your past life well enough to be able to tell you of particular blessings which you have received from the Lord. But even without this knowledge, my dear friends, I can suggest this confession of faith to you. As you consider your position in life, as you look upon parents, brothers and sisters, who surround you full of joy on this day, I can ask you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, who has always blessed His children, to join with David in this confession: "And now, Lord, Thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto Thy servant." And is not this at the same time the prayer of your soul also as you look forward into the future? After all, the best dower, the most precious wedding gift for the Christian, are the promises of God, who does not promise things only to break His promise the next moment, but whose covenants and grace endure for ever and ever. If they are your portion, then, dearly beloved, you will be able securely to tread the path before you—a path which you have entered, it is true, according to your own counsel and will, but according to the counsel and will also of the Almighty. Then you will be able to walk safely upon the highest heights of joy, but not less securely in the dark valley, in which the Lord alone is staff and rod. May this knowledge be a light on the path-

way which you together intend to follow. Let it never be extinguished by the many idols of home and heart which Christians so often worship. Neither human strength nor skill, nor wealth, pleasure, nor honor, but God in the heart and in the home—this is the source of all joy and happiness in the world.

And therefore, dear friends, we admonish you also in this hour to continue full of confidence: "Now, therefore, let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant, that it may be before Thee forever." Let it please thee—and yet David had reached the highest heights of happiness. How, then, can he utter a prayer like this? Let it please Thee—and yet he is only dust and ashes. How, then, does he dare to approach the Lord with these words? I imagine that David had just such thoughts as move your souls at this hour. He realized that he was entering upon a new period of his life, and he desired that the Almighty should be the beginning and the end of this new epoch. And while he knew that he was only dust and ashes, he knew also that he was a child of God, and was privileged to come to God in prayer. He knew that if he asked, it would be given unto him; if he sought he would find; if he knocked, the treasuries of divine blessings, temporal and spiritual, would be opened unto him. And now, dearly beloved, let this be your prayer also. A home may possess all conveniences; it may be furnished with all the luxuries of life. But if no altar for prayer has been set

up in it, it is after all but a poor home, and its inmates are not to be envied. May your home never become poor in this respect. I will presently pronounce upon you the blessing of the Triune God. Therefore commence now to pray, "Let it please thee, O Lord, to bless the house of Thy servant," so that He may become the foundation of your home, that he may abide in your home forever. The storms will blow, the waters of tribulation will rage in your life also, but if the Lord is the rock upon which your home has been erected, it will not fall, but stand securely.

It is not our intention to frighten you, but we would that your hearts be firmly established. How great and wonderful a possession is the blessing of the Almighty. They who possess it know how different it is from the blessing which the world bestows. They who do not strive to obtain it, can not understand its greatness, for it is a free gift of the Lord, and in regard to this gift it is often true: "Wonderful are Thy judgments, and Thy ways past finding out." And yet, "His thoughts are always higher than our thoughts; His ways higher than our ways." He means yea and amen, even though He seems to deny us our desires. He sends blessings, even when He seems to take from us that which we love, and sends us sorrow in its place. In many cases He has placed His richest blessings within a shell so hard and bitter that it takes all our faith to find the sweet kernel. Do not forget this, my friends. I am not a prophet, and much

less the messenger of misfortune, desiring to mar your happiness even for a moment. But I regard it as my duty to call your attention to the fact that during your married life you will often be called upon to bear the cross. The Lord himself could not enter into union with His church, without taking upon Himself the cross, nor will your souls be kept and strengthened in union with the Lord, without the cross. Should the days come, therefore, in which the Lord will lead you through the deepest depths of sorrow, do not forget that "all things work together for good to them that love God." "For Thou blessest, O Lord, and it shall be blessed forever."

Let me conclude with a picture taken from Holy Scripture. By the brook Jabbok you may behold a man whom the Lord has so richly blessed with worldly goods that he himself is compelled to acknowledge, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant." There he wrestles with a man until the dawn of day. Now then, my friends, whatever thoughts may move your soul in this hour, let all your desires, wishes and hopes be contained in the prayer of this man, Jacob-Israel: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," for "Thou blessest, Lord, and it shall be blessed forever." Amen.

VII.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his home upon a rock:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.—*Matthew 7, 24–27.*

The words of Holy Scripture which you have just heard are undoubtedly familiar to you. They form the conclusion of the sermon on the mount, and tell us of a foolish man who built his house upon the sand, and of a wise man who built his house upon a rock. You have appeared in the Lord's temple this day that you might invoke the blessing of the Almighty upon the union of your hearts. In this holy hour I will address this question to you: Upon what foundation will you erect your home?

(1) Upon that which passes away? or

(2) Upon that which abides forever?

The man who built his house upon sand was undoubtedly very foolish. He might have known that during a storm or a flood it would soon fall to ruins. The foundation is the most important part of the house, for it bears the entire structure, and if it has not been well built, then the superstructure is of no value. His neighbors and friends undoubtedly called the attention of this foolish man to these facts, and justly we condemn his action. And yet, how many followers this man has found in the course of the centuries! How many even today are like him! Will you also be numbered among them?

You resemble this man if you build your home upon the things of this world. You possess perhaps worldly riches, but if you put your trust in them, you will be disappointed. Earthly possessions are perishable. He who is rich today, may tomorrow be poor. And when your wealth disappears, or death knocks at the door of your home, then your house falls, for it has been built upon sand.

Perhaps you rely upon your health and your strength, or upon the beauty of youth. You may never have been sick; you may not even have seriously considered this possibility. And yet how soon can sickness come. When your strength is broken and you have no other support, your house crumbles into dust, for it has no foundation. If, therefore, you wish to resemble the wise man, then build your home not upon those things which pass away, but—

(2) Upon those things which remain eternally.

The wise man had built his house upon a rock, and when the rain descended and the floods came, and the wind blew, it stood firm and immovable. His house may not have looked as beautiful as the house of the foolish man, but its foundation was strong and secure. Do you ask, what is this strong foundation upon which we may erect our home? Then I answer: "For other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Experience will soon show you that all men, even those who appear happy, are confronted by foes. Everyone has enemies; everyone has hours of despondency and despair. Such stroms will also blow around your house, but they will not be able to destroy it, if Christ is its foundation, for He has given His children the promise: "Lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world." Trials and temptations are our constant companions through life, and it may often be difficult in the dark hours of life, to confess, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." But your home cannot fall if you have built it upon the rock Jesus Christ, if you, full of confidence, can pray, "I believe, Lord, help Thou my unbelief." No, the sun does not shine at all times, even in the firmament of matrimony. Though two may love each other, hours may come in which they will not understand one another. And yet, if those joined in wedlock can make the confession: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today,

and forever," then they can at all times find again the common foundation upon which their home has been erected.

Dearly beloved, upon what will you build your home; upon that which passes away, or upon that which abides forever? May the Lord guide your hearts, that you may reach a right decision, so that this hour may become for you an hour of richest blessing, for time and for eternity. Amen.

VIII.

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.

And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.

But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.

And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:

But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.— *Luke 10, 38–42.*

It is a solemn occasion which has brought you together in the temple of the Lord. You desire the blessing of the Almighty upon the union of your hearts. United you intend to walk through life, to share good and evil days. Those who love you, give you their best wishes for your future welfare, and we unite with them in invoking the blessing of the Almighty upon you. May you walk through life with Martha's zeal, and with Mary's love.

The Lord on one of His journeys had come to the house of Mary and Martha. Martha was cumbered about much serving. This certainly was not wrong. Many things must

be attended to in the home. To receive guests is our duty, and Martha's zeal, trouble and labor were for the Lord. Life will bring to you also much toil and trouble. The cares of every-day life come upon everybody, and he is foolish who lightly thinks to avoid them. As long as human beings breathe upon earth, the words will hold true, "In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat thy bread." And, we may add, that which makes life worth living is toil and labor. May you not be wanting in the true zeal of Martha.

And yet the Lord rebuked Martha. Why? Because she allowed this outward care to occupy all her time and attention; because she imagined that her labor was sufficient; because amidst her work she neglected the salvation of her soul. This certainly is wrong. If we take interest only in the labors of every-day life, in the cares and troubles of human existence, then our souls starve, faith is weakened and finally destroyed altogether. For this reason it is necessary that Martha's zeal be united with Mary's love.

2. Mary is quietly sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His words. At other times undoubtedly she was very industrious, but now the Lord has entered her home, and as she beholds Him, she forgets the affairs of every-day life, and thinks only of the eternal life. May this be true during your life also.

You two, dear friends, have been brought up in Christian homes, and you have reason to be grateful to the Lord for

this blessing. You have been trained in the spirit of Christ; you know the blessings of a Christian family life. Keep what you have inherited. Let your home be a house of the Lord among the children of men; let the fire of love burn in your souls; let the incense of prayer ascend to the throne of the Most High. Be diligent in searching the Scriptures. Give the Bible the place of honor in your home. Be faithful in the future also in your attendance upon the services in the temple of the Lord, for it is there you will learn to sing hymns of praise and of thanksgiving; it is there alone you will find new strength for the struggles of life. Let your lives be guided by that love, which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Let these words be written as a motto upon your hearts and in your home: "One thing is needful."

We do not know what the future has in store for you. You will find in it good and evil days. And if the Lord sends you blessings, so that you can realize that His compassions have not failed, and are new unto you ever morning, then find in this fact an admonition to seek the one thing which is needful, namely, the salvation of your soul, to serve Him of whom it is written, "Thou art fairer than the children of men." And if the hours should come of which you will say that you have no pleasure in them; if the dark hosts of suffering and sorrow will not flee; if sickness like an unwelcome guest should enter your home; if death should

knock at the door of your household; then let Him be your refuge and strength Who says to you on this occasion, "One thing is needful."

Dearly beloved, Martha's zeal, Mary's love—strive to possess them, preserve them, and your lives will be richly blessed. Amen.

IX.

But he shall be named the Priests of the Lord: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourself.—*Isaiah 61, 6.*

On the wedding day the groom gives to his beloved bride, not only a new home, but also a new name. According to the words of the prophet, the Almighty bestows on those within the marriage bond two new names, namely: Priests of the Lord, and ministers of God. It is true these names are in one sense old, but they should ever gain new significance that you may become, more and more, priests of the Lord, and ministers of God.

The priests of God in the Old Testament wore white garments. You, as priests of the new covenant, may and ought to wear the spotless robe of Christ's perfect righteousness. The priests in olden times were anointed with holy oil. You ought to be anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit. The pre-rogative of the Old Testament priests, to approach the Lord with prayer and thanksgiving, has through Christ become the privilege of the New Testament priests, that is, of all the children of the Lord. And I am certain that you will make use of this privilege in all the varied experiences of your future life.

Priests had their home in the temple of the Lord. Doubt-

less the words of the psalmist apply to you also: "The sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of Hosts." Yet, however cozy your home may be, you should always be able to say, "Lord, I love the habitation of Thy house."

Further, priests offered sacrifices. What will you offer to the Lord as a sacrifice? Bring Him the pleasing sin-offering of a penitent, broken spirit; the perfect burnt-offering of a sanctified heart and body, the sweet-smelling incense of prayer, the acceptable praise-offering for all the benefits of the Lord, the meat and drink offerings of love and mercy.

The priests were privileged to bestow the blessing of the Almighty upon the people. May you not only receive but also bestow blessings upon all who enter your home. In a word, may you become and be called priests of the Lord.

But you shall also be called ministers of God. I am certain that both of you cross the threshold of matrimony with the words of Joshua, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." May God himself grant you that spirit of obedience which at all times asks, What would Jesus say? May the Master's words, "Without Me ye can do nothing," arouse within your hearts the echo, "Without Thee we will do nothing." And because the Lord has been faithful to you, requite this faithfulness with faithfulness. Sanctify your whole heart, all your strength, all your powers, to Him.

If the Lord should see fit some day to place upon your shoulders a heavy cross, then prove that you have not only strength to do, but also strength to bear.

Moreover, what does the Lord do for His children? He provides for them, much better and more abundantly than any earthly lord cares for his servants. God regards his servants as children, for they have become His children through Jesus Christ. What a blessed assurance, to know that the Lord will give us all things needful for body and soul. This, of course, does not mean that you will be exempt from labor and toil, but it will keep you from care and worry. The Lord provides for His children as a father, He rewards them royally. He crowneth them with lovingkindness and tender mercies. You also, dearly beloved, will experience the kindness and goodness of the Lord during your lives. The Lord in whose service you are engaged is good. May He at the end of your priestly career address to you the words: "Where I am, you, my servants, shall be also." Amen

X.

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the goods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord. — *Joshua 24, 15.*

These solemn words were once uttered by Joshua, when he had assembled the children of Israel for the last time. In impressive words he had asked them to choose between the dead idols of the heathen, and the living God, Jehovah, the benefactor of Israel. You may choose as you will, he says to them, as it were, you may be grateful or ungrateful, wise or foolish, "but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

It was a decisive hour in which this pious decision was taken and uttered. In your lives also a decisive hour has come. Ah, that these words may also move your souls and flow from your lips: "We will serve the Lord."

Consider, in the first place, the brief word "but," in the confession of Joshua, and utter it, with him, with firm determination. It is directed against the inconsistency and unfaithfulness of many in our day; against the many married people who halt between two opinions, now serving the God of revelation, then the gods invented by man, called by

whatever name they may be—nature, or fate, or wealth, or pleasure; against the many homes in which we discover so little of true Christianity, in which one may never hear the Word of God or the voice of prayer. In contrast to these, resolve today: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Establish a Christian home and let it continue such. Be and remain the salt of the earth, the light of the world. The Lord needs such homes in this time of unbelief and of religious indifference.

Notice further the declaration of Joshua: "We will *serve* the Lord." Such service demands faithful attendance upon the services of the Lord's temple, and upon the sacraments of the Lord. For by doing this you give to God and Christ what is theirs, and at the same time you receive rich gifts of grace out of the treasury of divine goodness. This service requires, further, that you in your home hallow the name of the Lord, read His Word, fulfill His will, and offer to Him the incense of prayer. When there is given to God the honor which is His due, His honor and glory will dwell in the home, His kingdom will come, and body and soul will receive their daily bread. This service demands also faithfulness in the pursuits of daily life, according to the words of Luther: "Prayer a work, and work a prayer." Finally, this service requires gratefulness in the days of joy, humility in the days of sorrow, and that love which "seeketh not her own,"

but also her neighbor's good, and which gladly divides with him everything of this changing life—joy as well as sorrow.

A home in which the Lord is served in this manner is a happy home, built upon a rock against which the billows of distress and the floods of temptation break in vain.

Decide today to become the servants of the Lord. Take the words of Joshua as a motto for your home, for then your home will be a home of "Joshua"—that is "whose help is Jehovah." Amen.

XI.

Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. — *John 20, 19.*

"Peace be unto you!" With these words of greeting the risen Christ appeared in the midst of His disciples on Easter Sunday. He who so gladly distributed gifts of grace among His followers, knew of no better gift to bestow upon the disciples whom He loved, than the greeting, "Peace be unto you." Dearly beloved, you know that on your wedding day your pastor wishes you much joy and happiness, and yet the best wish after all is that which is expressed in the words of the Master, "Peace be unto you."

"Peace be unto you." During my ministry I have frequently entered homes which were richly blessed with the goods of this world and favored by fortune. But I have also entered into homes which had to struggle against poverty, affliction and want. I have always noted that the happiness of a home does not depend upon outward circumstances, but upon the disposition of the people within it, the condition of their hearts. They alone decide the happiness or unhappiness of the home. All other considerations are unimportant.

"Peace be unto you." Thus I say to you from the depths of my soul. You love each other with your whole

heart. Love and nothing else has brought you together, and it is your firm determination to love one another until death shall part you. This determination will have to bear many a test. It is not necessarily through others that you will be tempted, or the endeavor come to separate you from one another, to destroy your love. You yourselves will be the cause of many a test. You imagine that you know one another thoroughly. You are mistaken in this, for the eyes of people who love one another are often holden. They see each other in Sunday array, but not in everyday garb. It will be during the days of your married life that you will learn to know each other. It will be a question whether or not you will then find only good and noble traits. Then you must get acquainted with one another, and you will be compelled to forbear and to forgive, if you wish to live in peace.

"Peace be unto you." Thus the risen Christ spoke to His disciples, and immediately after He had uttered the words, He showed them His hands and His side. The Lord knew that peace could not be and remain with them, if He, the Prince of Peace, did not give them His peace, "which surpasseth all understanding." If we have the peace of God, and peace with God, then we can have also peace with one another until the end. He who has experienced the love and the kindness of the Almighty, is willing and anxious for His sake to be kind and loving to everyone. He who has experienced the forbearing and forgiving love of God in Christ, is also willing to forbear and to forgive others.

You have richly experienced the lovingkindness of the Lord. It is true he has not preserved you from all sorrow and sadness. But although He has taken from you some whom you loved, He has left many whom you may love. He has guided you on the path of life so that you should meet and learn to know one another. And having brought you together, He will now bless you.

You have richly experienced the goodness of the Lord in Christ Jesus. Where you have failed, he has forgiven your shortcomings, and He will never become weary in forgiving your faults. As often as you come to Him, He will take the burden from your soul and say to you: "Be content; depart in peace, and I will be your God and Father to all eternity."

May this peace be with you at all times. For it is the source of all peace in the world, not only peace with one another, but also peace of the soul, so that one can humbly submit to the wonderful ways and seemingly strange counsels of the Lord. If we have this peace, then we are satisfied with everything the Lord sends us, for we know that the Almighty has always thoughts of peace toward us, so that we may, even in the fires of tribulation, say, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

May the God of peace be your comfort in the days of darkness; may He be the source of your joy in days of prosperity. May He heal the wounds of the heart, and sanctify the joys of the soul. "Peace be unto you." Amen.

XII.

Now therefore let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever: for thou blessest, O Lord, and it shall be blessed for ever.—*1 Chronicles 17, 27.*

It is the will of God that man should be a blessing to man. Wherever two hearts are filled with love for one another, wherever two hands are united to work and to pray for each other, there it may truly be said, these two have been destined to become a blessing to one another. And should I ask you in this solemn hour, what is your purpose in taking up your life's journey together? you would undoubtedly answer, nothing else than to live with and for each other, to become a blessing each to the other through life. For this your loved ones offer you their wishes and prayers. They gather up all their wishes into the prayer, that the Lord may let the sun of His grace shine in your home, that He may bestow His richest blessings upon your house. You also combine your desires to-day into the one prayer for the blessing of the Lord, knowing that he is blessed forever who is blessed by the Lord. The wedding day is a day of sacred joy. On this day the hearts beat faster, the eyes shine brighter Friends from near and far surround the bridal couple. And yet, what is the most elaborate wedding without the blessing of the Almighty? It is only where He fills the hearts with

His joy, where He is invited to the wedding, that this day can be a day of true joy. Therefore do not forget to ask Him: "Now, therefore, let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant." Blessed is the home which is built upon the blessing of the Almighty, and which ever continues to ask for that blessing. In the labors of the day, prayer for the Lord's blessing should be the first and the last duty of husband and wife. We hope that you will find few thorns on your journey through life. But you know well that all Christians must pass through much tribulation. If, therefore, the Lord places some heavy cross upon your shoulders, be steadfast in prayer, so that you may find out the blessings of tribulation. And if days should come in which it will be difficult for you to understand one another, in which the evil seed of discord begins to spring up in your souls, then seize the only remedy. Pray for and with one another, "Now, therefore, let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant, for Thou blessest, O Lord, and it shall be blessed forever." The joys of the wedding day pass, the most beautiful wedding gifts, the stateliest homes, become old; but one thing never grows old, never vanishes even in the hour of death—the blessing of God. Regard it as the most precious wedding gift, as the greatest treasure of your home. May it abide upon you today and forevermore. May your entire married life be a proof of the truth of the passage: "For Thou blessest, O Lord, and it shall be blessed forever." Amen.

XIII.

And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.—*Colossians 3, 14.*

Radient in the beauty of youth, surrounded by relatives and friends, I welcome you, dearly beloved, before the altar of the Lord. You have come to spend a quiet hour on this eventful day; a moment of meditation amid the excitement of this festal occasion. At this hour the Almighty Himself addresses to you a word which, amid the passing splendor of this day, shall remind you of the lasting treasure of heaven: "And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness."

The thoughts which move your souls at this hour; the prayers and petitions which fill the hearts of your loved ones; the supplications of dear ones in heaven before the throne of God, are all contained in the passage of Holy Scripture which we have just read. It is a prayer of thanksgiving you would offer for that love of God and of your friends which you have experienced so richly? Would you express the sentiment with which you take upon yourselves the duty of married life? Or are your thoughts filled with the hope which lights up the way as you look into the future? May all the feelings which move your soul this day be touched and hallowed as you utter the words: "Above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness."

God created woman to be a helpmeet for man. A helpmeet in rest and in labor, in joy and in sorrow, to help him bear the burdens of life which rest on his shoulder. She is a helpmeet also on the way of life, where often the weaker must support the stronger. Although she is weak, she may become the stronger, for in the kingdom of God the words hold true, "I am made strong in weakness." And if the husband has been called the head of the wife, it is not that God has laid upon him a greater honor, but a greater responsibility. He is the sturdy oak to which the vine clings for support and defense.

In certain high and solemn hours like this, vows are made; and during the quiet hours of everyday life they are kept. Do not wait for special occasions to prove the sincerity of your love, but pay the debt of love in the ordinary affairs of daily life. If it happens that one must humble himself for the sake of the other, or if both be called to prove that they do not seek their own, but the welfare of each other then it is seen whether or not their affection is that genuine love which "believeth all things, beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." "Put on, therefore," the apostle writes, "as the elect of God, holy, beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meakness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." These are rays which radiate from the

sun. "And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness."

What constitutes the happiness of a home? Relatives and friends are eager to make the wedding day the most memorable event in life for the young people whom they love. But does their care insure true happiness? Or does happiness consist in the fulfillment of the hopes of youth? Our hopes pass away as we approach the goal. And as varying as is our life, so varying also are our desires. It is not we who rule over our lives, with their hopes and desires, but God with His almighty hand. And because he rules, therefore we should at all times say with the psalmist: "Trust in the Lord, and He shall bring it to pass." This constitutes true happiness, that we be firmly established in the faith of God's eternal goodness, and that our hearts be one in His love.

The apostle calls love the bond of perfectness. God is love. In the love which seeketh not her own, we become related to God, and partake of the divine nature. Faith and hope will be changed, but love will abide. Love is first and last. Love unites hearts, and conducts them together on that path of life which leads to the eternal home. Should we omit this thought? It seems to me that this is the most blessed certainty—we have to know that our union is not for a few short years only, but that it lasts to all eternity. Then love becomes indeed the bond of perfectness, for "love never faileth." Amen.

XIV.

A PASTOR.

And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.—*Genesis 32, 26.*

It seemed when we entered the temple of the Lord a few moments ago, that the organ pealed even more joyfully than at other times. For today a servant of the Lord, a guardian of the sanctuary, who has blessed the union of many hearts, stands before the altar. And for this reason also, the congregation takes a special interest in this ceremony.

In spirit we can hear the blessings of the parents which build homes for the children. Though this blessing applies equally to both of you, yet it seems to me that on the youthful brow of the bride we can behold the halo of the blessings of her sainted father. And to these blessings which you receive from the eternal world, we will add the blessing of the divine word of God. We will enter into the holy of holies and join in the prayer of Jacob: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." This passage reveals to us:

(1) The deep desire which fills your souls this day;

(2) The arduous work to which you pledge yourselves;

(3) The blessed hope which shelters you to all eternity.

1.

Jacob was enabled to utter the prayer, "I will not let

Thee go, except Thou bless me," only after a dark night of distress.

The festal event which you celebrate today is not an occasion of darkness, but of joy. "Bless the Lord, oh my soul!" you exclaim, full of gladness, and add humbly, while remembering the goodness of the Lord, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant."

Though we hope that your path will lead only through pleasant pastures, yet we cannot expect it. The clouded hours of life will overshadow your life also. Your future is veiled with darkness. But you know the word, "Through the cross to the crown," and you are willing to pray: The greater the cross, the nearer heaven. Yet often, when the God of grace arises against us as our adversary, the light of faith is almost extinguished.

2.

You are both accustomed to arduous work. The congregation which you serve, dear brother, will gladly bear testimony to this fact. And that you, dear bride, are not ashamed of work, has gained for you many true friends. Do you wish to become a helpmeet to your husband in his holy vocation? Do you desire to travel united on the path to life eternal? Then, like Jacob, retire into the stillness, that

you may become strong for the noble and important work in which you are to labor as long as you live.

Without this work within our own soul, all our strenuous toil gains no blessing for ourselves or for our congregation. Only as you share in this wrestling of the soul, will you, dear bride, become a weaver of peace, as the ancient Germans called their wives. In this common labor you take the burning coals from the altar of the Lord, with them to kindle the hearth-fire of your home and heart. In this work you learn to understand the secret of a happy home, which consists in forgetting the "me" and caring for the "thee." In this arduous work you will discover that every union is lasting and enduring only as it is established upon the immovable foundation. If you are truly united for this arduous work, then the words, "I will not let Thee go," will become a firm foundation which cannot be shaken, a strong tie which cannot be broken. Yea, the words, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me," will become a hallelujah of victory, because you know that you are sheltered to all eternity.

3.

Jacob had striven with God and with men, and had prevailed. He received the name Israel, that is, "Prince of (*wrestler with*) God."

A great change takes place in your lives to-day. You,

dear bride, leave the home of your parents and accept the name of your husband, while you both say willingly, What is mine, is thine.

Thus your home will become a home of peace, of blessing, the vestibule of heaven. Build your home upon the grace of God. Have your windows open toward Jerusalem. Write these words with golden letters over the entrance of your home: "My house is a house of prayer." Choose as a motto for your journey through life: "The Lord is my shepherd." Let the promise of the Lord be your granary: "I will not leave thee nor forsake thee." Thus the pillars of your house will be firmly established. If within or without the dark clouds of distress threaten you, you know the way which will lead you out of the night into the light of God's grace. You have a herb which can sweeten the bitter waters of Mara. You can open the gates of heaven with the humble and yet courageous, struggling and yet victorious prayer: "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." Amen.

XV.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee from me.—*Ruth 1, 16–17.*

"Faithful unto death"—thus we might briefly express the truths contained in the passage of Holy Scripture which you have selected for this occasion. Faithful unto death, Ruth leaves her mother's home, her people, and her gods, that she might go with the mother of her husband into a foreign country, there to live among a strange people, who serve another God, the one true, living God. Faithful unto death! This shall be your motto as you enter upon the holy estate of matrimony in the presence of God and of these witnesses. God himself shall hear the confession of your lips and hearts, as you join your hands—a symbol of the union of your hearts. May He so bless your married life, that it may always be said of you, "Faithful unto death."

Ruth shows you what is the significance of these words for your lives also:

(1) Thy way is my way;

(2) Thy people are my people;

(3) Thy God is my God.

1.

Naomi is loath to accept the sacrifice of Ruth; she wants to send her home to her mother. But Ruth is faithful. She says: "Intreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee. For whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge." Thus also it is your firm determination never to leave one another. United you intend to walk through life, wherever God may lead you. Your hearts have been joined by love. God has graciously brought you to the hour when you can enter into matrimony. Within your hearts the words resound: "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge." Thus it ought to be in marriage, the sacred institution of God. The husband ought to leave father and mother and cleave to his wife. The bride should follow the husband of her choice wherever God may lead. You shall walk united, whether on paths of joy and gladness, or of sorrow and sadness. Shared joy is twofold joy, shared sorrow is divided sorrow. Journey through life, faithful unto death. Then as the years go by your hearts will be joined even more firmly in love. Then you will learn to esteem one another more and more, and at the same time you will learn to overlook more and more one another's faults and weaknesses. "Thy way is my way." Let this be the pledge of love in this hour. And add to this: "Thy people shall be my people."

2.

Ruth leaves the people of Moab. With the mother of her husband she departs to another people. And he who in ancient times left his people, went into exile. But her love gladly brings this sacrifice. You need not leave the country of your birth; you will remain citizens of this great country; and yet for you also it becomes necessary to say in this hour: "Thy people shall be my people." It is your duty to strive for the welfare of the nation. The husband should engage in public life, so that justice and right may reign in our land. The wife should learn to reign in the seclusion of the home, so that everyone who enters under its roof may feel its cheer. You should be as faithful to the family into which you enter through marriage, as to the family of your birth.

3.

"Thy God is my God." This apparently is the hardest proof of devotion which Ruth could offer to the mother of her husband. And yet actually it is the most precious sacrifice. The fact that the true God of her husband and his mother had at this time already become her God, gave her the courage of her faithful love. Undoubtedly she had heard her departed husband pray to the living God, she had seen him depart in firm faith. She had experienced how the mother who in a strange country had lost her husband and her two sons, had patiently borne this heavy cross. These

facts had led her to his God. Trusting in this God, she gladly goes with the mother of her husband into a foreign country. Thy God is my God, thy faith my faith, thy trust my example, thy life of love my strength—thus also you ought to confess. United to serve your God and Saviour, in your home with your prayers, in your daily lives with your love—this is your duty as Christians. This is the root of your love and faithfulness. May God grant you His blessing, that today you may confess with a sincere heart: "Thy way is my way; thy people shall be my people; thy God is my God." Then, dear bride, your parents may let you depart into another city without fear. You go with God, and His blessing will accompany you. Then nothing, neither tribulation nor sorrow, neither discord nor dissention, will be able to separate you from one another. Nothing but death can part you. Amen.

XVI.

A PASTOR.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.—*Ruth 1, 16–17.*

One way! thus we exclaim as we read this confession of faithful devotion. These words strike a responsive chord within your hearts. Alone you have thus far traveled along the path of life. You, dear brother, along the sunny heights and through the dark valleys of your student life, and during the past years of your ministry. You, dear sister, in the home of your parents, with gentleness of heart and ministering love, caring for those whom you hold dear.

Now the Father of mankind has united your souls and your paths. It has become one way. What shall befall you on this way? The way which leads to this sanctuary is strewn with flowers. The way of life cannot and will not always be strewn with roses. Dear brother, lead the companion whom you have chosen, on the way which you yourself have selected, in the fellowship of the Lord. And thou, dear sister, lean upon his strong arm and follow him in full confidence.

United you will walk upon this way, and this way leads, in the first place, to a home, the home of an Evangelical Lutheran minister. The Catholic church has also many parsonages, erected by the master hand of the architect. But all the homes of their ministers are lacking in one thing. There is wanting in the house the joy and the crown of the home. You, dear sister, are to be the glory of your home.

Around the head and heart of the Evangelical minister, also, flutter the spirits of despondency. He sows confidence and reaps mistrust. His heart glows in the desire to bring salvation and healing to souls through the Word of the Lord but they do not heed his voice. He works and prays, prays and works for the spiritual welfare of those entrusted to him, but even with the keen eye of love he discovers very little fruit. By learning to understand the work of your husband and his personal peculiarities, you will succeed in making your home a true Evangelical minister's home. And who could sufficiently sing the praises of such a home? A temple of peace in these stormy days; a place of true, noble simplicity amid the cravings of millions for vain pleasures. A castle of purity to which hundreds will hasten for help. If you succeed in establishing a home like this, how gladly will the weary and heavy-laden, the hundreds afflicted by moral and physical infirmities, enter through your doors.

(3) "Thy people shall be my people," you continue. You will become acquainted with the people only as you live with

them. Love is the best teacher. Your home should be the center of true patriotism. This has at all times been the glory of the Evangelical ministry. Many patriots have come forth from the homes of ministers. The inhabitants of the parsonage fear God, and therefore they honor the civil powers, and will always be willing to do everything in their power to extend the glory of their country.

(4) Even to the unmarried servant of the Lord it is a special privilege and pleasure, that day after day, and Sunday after Sunday, he may with his brethren and sisters, lift praying hands to the Lord. Now much more precious will his life be when it is uplifted day after day by the blessings also of family devotion? Daily worship in and with the family forms the precious frame which encircles the labors of the day, and it ennobles even the most commonplace work.

It is possible for the unmarried minister of the gospel to impress the words of love which he proclaims from the pulpit by deeds of love in his daily life. But what a helpmeet his wife can be to him in this respect! Behold, dear sister, the blessed service of the Lord which you may perform by visiting the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and by keeping yourself unspotted before the world.

(5) "Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried," thus Ruth vowed to her mother. She kept faith until death. You ought to follow in her footsteps. Is it

suitable on the joyous day of your wedding to remind you of this fact? If death is the last word, then it is wrong. But if life—eternal life—is the last word and goal, then we may even cast a glance upon the grave, especially since it is the destiny of man to be placed therein before he can enter into life eternal. And in that realm a union of blessedness is awaiting you. Thus, then, in the life of the Christian, faithfulness unto death is transformed into faithfulness to all eternity.

May the sun of grace send its rays upon you during the day, and the pole-star of love during the night. May the Lord of Hosts, whom even the storms and the sea obey, guide your bark of life until it safely arrives in the haven of rest. One way, one home, one people, one God, one life eternal. Amen.

XVII.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.— *Psalm 119, 105.*

It is not given to the children of men to know the future. We do not know what the coming day, or even the following moment, may have in store for us. Thus the natural man gropes in darkness, filled with fear and trembling. Different is it with the Christian. Though God has not revealed the future to him, yet he has given him a bright light, His Word. It is your intention to journey together through life. You have appeared at this time in the house of the Lord, that you might receive from the hand of the all-loving Father light for the journey of life. It is for you to repeat the words of the psalmist: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

(1) A guide;
(2) A comforter;
(3) A source of blessings.

1.

If a mariner wishes to undertake a journey, it is not sufficient for him to know whether or not the vessel is well built, the machinery in good order, and the weather favorable. He must also have a good compass. On the ship of life, this compass is the Word of God. As the magnetic needle al-

ways points toward the polar star, so the Word of God always points to the Father of Light, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. The Word of God must be the form and guide for the actions of the Christian. How rich is the Word in accounts of pious married people. There we behold Abraham and Sarah, Boaz and Ruth, Elkanah and Hannah, Joseph and Mary. In many precious passages it shows us the right relation between husband and wife. You doubtless know the beautiful simile which Paul uses, of the relation between husband and wife, comparing it to the relation between Christ and the church—the husband the head of the wife, the wife the heart of the husband.

2.

When storms arise so that the ship is tossed to and fro on the billows of the sea, the compass does not deviate in the least. The Word of God will be your comforter in times of trouble. Let not your hearts be troubled because I speak of afflictions. The twenty-third Psalm speaks not only of pleasant pastures, but also of the valley of the shadow of death. You will meet with affliction. May the Word of God be a light and a lamp in those hours. Ah, how kindly does it speak to the sorrowful! It tells us of the love of the Father, which is stronger even than death. Mountains shall depart and hills be removed, but His kindness shall not depart. The river of God is full of water. He shall deliver

thee in six troubles, yea, in seven there shall no evil befall thee. After a period of affliction His love tastes so much the sweeter. The hope of the righteous shall be gladness.

&.

Thus we find the Word of God more and more a source of blessing, though sometimes the blessing is as a sweet kernel within a bitter shell. But in order that it may become a source of blessing to us, we must give it the place of honor in the home. Of what value is a costly Bible if it be covered with dust? Far better is it if we possess but an inexpensive copy, and read it day after day. There should be no day without devotion, no meal without prayer. Husband and wife must study the Word together and constantly exhort one another. One must set the other an example by an exemplary life. As Adam and Eve ate day after day of the fruit of the tree of life, so you must daily partake of the life-giving Word. Blessed is the home of which the words may be spoken: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Blessed is that married life to which the words of Paul may be applied: "The woman is the glory of the man." Blessed are the wedded pair who as they walk together can say: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." Amen.

XVIII.

A GOLDEN WEDDING.

I am as a wonder unto many: but thou art my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all thy day. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.—*Psalm 71, 7–9.*

Greetings, peace and grace be with you, venerable friends. In this solemn hour I greet you with the words: May God be with you in the future as He has been with you in the past. A divine blessing would I, as a servant of the Word and of the Church, bestow upon you: "The grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the love of God, the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, rest upon and abide with you, now and forevermore." A gift of grace I present to you in the name of the Lord of Lords. It is the most precious gift which can be presented to you. It is the firmest rod and staff on your pilgrimage through life; it is the purest fountain —one which will at all times refresh your thirsting hearts; it is the best medicine against sin, sickness and spiritual and eternal death; it is the brightest light on the way through the dark valley of this earthly life to the home above.

"I am as a wonder to many, but Thou art my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with Thy praise, and with Thy honor all the day. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth."

The first of these verses reminds you of the past years of your married life. As you reflect upon your life, are you not obliged to exclaim: "I am as a wonder unto many"? You have spent together fifty years of happiness and joy—this is a wonder to many. For happy marriages in our days are scarce, because only few married people put their trust in the Lord. You have reached an old age, and yet body and soul are strong and healthy—this also is a wonder unto many, for no man can by his own power add a day to the length of his life. This is of the Lord. You have never been in want of daily bread, and now you enter upon old age free from care and want. This is a wonder to many. *You* simply say with David: "I have been young, now I am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." The Lord has gladdened your life by the birth of children. But all, with the exception of the son who has come to celebrate this occasion with you, have been called to the eternal home. Yea, you have been compelled to give up several sons in the prime of life. You have been forced to accompany to the grave the sunshine of your old age, your granddaughter. These sad events would have broken the heart of many a father and mother. You have survived these sorrows. This is a wonder unto many. But you explain it by saying, "The Lord is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." You have experienced that injustice, enmity, unfaithfulness, uncharitableness of the world, by which many a heart has been broken, but you have overcome

them. This is a wonder unto many. How much sin and iniquity has rested heavily upon your soul during the past fifty years. Death is the wages of sin, but you still enjoy life. The Lord has wrought this miracle of grace, for He has been your comfort, your peace, and your life.

2.

Since with the psalmist you have experienced the faithfulness of the Lord, you will undoubtedly, my venerable friends, also say with him: "My mouth shall be filled with Thy praise, and with Thy honor all the day."

All praise is due the Almighty who has created you, and has preserved the health of your body and soul. He has constantly spread the table for you; he has held His protecting hands over you in many dangers, and for these blessings you cannot sufficiently thank Him. Yea, if you had a thousand lips and a thousand tongues, and if then you could sing the praise of the Lord for a thousand years, you would not be able to express your gratitude. It is true you have experienced many dark days during the fifty years of your married life, but it was not His wrath, but His love; not His justice but His grace, which chastised you. He has taken you as His children into His own school, and has Himself instructed you, so that you might be able to learn the truth of the words, "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." "We must

through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Now, then, if the Lord has accomplished His work, it is for you, having graduated from the school of the cross, to exclaim, "Let my mouth be filled with Thy praise, and with Thy honor all the day." In hours of weakness, wavering and doubt, the all-loving Father has given you His Holy Spirit as a comforter and a guide, so that you could be patient in tribulation, rejoicing in hope, instant in prayer. Therefore you ought to cry: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy soul from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." Your lips must daily overflow with praise and thanksgiving. Yes, daily! The evening of your lives has come. You have a right to rest from the labors of the day. But the light and strengthening labor of praise and prayer should never cease. This is the foretaste of the eternal life, when after the weeping of the night, the morning shall come that bringeth joy.

3.

Therefore, trusting in the grace of God, continue on your journey of life as long as it is pleasing to Him. The gifts for which in the future you should especially ask are simply and

beautifully expressed in the words of our text: "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth." Utter this prayer in the name of Jesus, and He will say, Yea and amen. "Cast me not off in the time of old age." The Lord certainly will not do so, if only you remain steadfast in faith, in love and in hope. Prove your faith in God on this day, especially by confessing to Him your sins and failings, and by asking for His forgiveness. Be not afraid to ask each another pardon for the failings of the past fifty years, for then you will experience in your forgiving hearts the forgiving love of the Master. "Forsake me not when my strength faileth." Could He forsake you, who on the day of your baptism gave you the promise, "I will keep thee as the apple of the eye"? Fifty years ago when you entered into the holy estate of matrimony under His blessing He gave you the promise: "Even to your old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs I will carry you; I have made and I will bear, yea, I will carry and deliver you," "Forsake me not when my strength faileth." As the two disciples who journeyed together to Emmaus constrained the Master, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent," even so do you constrain Him by your prayers. For if you invite Him, He will abide with you, as with the two disciples; He will make His home in your hearts; He will make you strong during the days of old age, so that in His strength you shall be able to overcome even that strongest foe, death and hell. Amen.

XIX.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity.—*1 Cor. 13, 13.*

The three qualities which are mentioned in our text, faith, love and hope, must be the foundation of the life of every child of God; and if they must be the foundation of our life they must also be the foundations of the home. And they will always find their place in the marriage relation of the Christian. First of all, faith. Faith and confidence are synonyms. It is confidence which establishes this union. The confidence of the parents gives the beloved child to her husband. And would you, dear brother, firmly seize the hand of your bride in this hour, to retain it throughout the days of your life, would you, dear sister, gladly promise to be faithful to the husband of your choice, if you did not have the mutual confidence and faith, that you will be able to establish a happy home by your union? If, however, this faith is not to be shaken by the storms and changes of life, it must in turn be founded upon confidence in someone else, faith in the Lord, your God.

And now abideth faith and love. What occasion is more appropriate for proclaiming the praises of love than the wedding day? It is love which has led you thus far: the love of God, which has guided you so that to-day you can

lift grateful hands and hearts to Him while you utter the prayer, "I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies;" the love of your parents, which has watched over you in the days of your childhood and of your youth. Love surrounds you on this day on all sides, the love of those who rejoice with you. Even from the eternal world the loving eyes of departed relatives and friends look down upon you, and invoke the blessing of the Almighty upon the union of your hearts.

This love dwells especially in your hearts. Nor can you possess too much of it. For during your married life it will have to endure many severe tests. It will be proved in the disappointments and trials of every-day life. It will prove itself by patience in bearing the faults of one another. Do not forget that you will have to forgive and to forbear. When love is lacking in a home it seems cold and inhospitable, as if the storms of winter were raging in it; but where love reigns as queen, there it is warm and cozy, as if the gentle spring sun were sending its rays into heart and home. The heavenly sun it is which must constantly kindle anew the flame of love within the heart. To endeavor to renew our love in our own strength would be like attempting to draw water from a dry well. Christ is that one fountain of love which is never exhausted. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

And finally hope. This quality also has a wide field on this day. Let us not amid the many earthly wishes and

hopes which stir our hearts to-day, forget the one great hope, which is that we may be saved. To work out our salvation is the most important task of our lives. May you be companions also on the narrow way leading to life eternal, helping one another on the road to the eternal home. And what shall be our hopes as to the way between this day and the eternal goal? We will commit it to the loving Father in heaven. It is He who has brought you together, and He will lead you in the future. Lord, deal with us according to Thy good pleasure. We are satisfied to know that we are attended and sustained by Thy wisdom and love. This is our hope. "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love." Amen.

XX.

But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the Lord will hear when I call unto him.—*Psalm 4, 3.*

There is not a child of God in the world who does not have reason gratefully to praise the wonderful ways of the Lord. His dealings all serve for our welfare and happiness. You, dear friends, have a special reason for praising the Lord on this day. You have trodden separate paths during the past. To-day your lives shall be united. Of course you must understand that your ways are the ways of the Lord. This understanding you will gain when you consider the words of the psalmist: "But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself." This passage admonishes us:

To consider the wonderful ways of the Lord—

(1) With reverence;

(2) With gratitude;

(3) With hope.

1.

It is strange how God destines and educates for one another two human beings who have known nothing of each other, who have never seen each other. He does not always unite similar characters, but rather such as complement each other, i. e., who are so constituted that the virtues of the

one supplement and balance the faults of the other. I do not speak of such marriages which are entered upon on account of outward, monetary, worldly reasons, but of those to which the words of Holy Scripture apply: "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." The Lord of Glory, whom the cherubim and seraphim serve, who guides the moon and the stars, does not regard it as too unimportant to concern himself with two human beings,to train and to educate them until they have found one another. The loving Father in heaven beholds even the smallest and apparently most unimportant things. To Him nothing is unimportant and without significance. His faithfulness is great and His truth endureth forever. He says in regard to every human being: "Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

2.

To this sense of reverence is added the feeling of gratitude. You realize that you each need a supplement. Each of you has longed to find a heart in which you could trust implicitly. Now your longing has been satisfied. True, the fulfillment of this hope imposes many self-denials upon you. You must give up many things which are dear to you. You especially, dear bride, are called to undergo such self-denial. You must part from your loved ones and leave the companions of your youth. But you receive greater and richer gifts in exchange.

God so leads His children that they do not lose, but always gain. Therefore your parents bless the union of your hearts. With them you undoubtedly confess, full of gratitude, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

3.

If God has graciously guided you in the past, if He reveals His presence to you even to-day, should He not deserve your confidence for the future also? "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him." "Hope maketh not ashamed." Cast it like an anchor into the bleeding wounds of Him who died on the cross for a sinful race. Hope is the staff of the godly. On it they lean when the days come in which they say, we have no pleasure in them. To the natural man this earth is a vale of tears, to the children of the Lord the fore-court of the sanctuary. Amid the changing events of this life hope tells you that God is your Father and you are His dear children. It teaches you to confess, even in the darkest hours of life, "He will never leave us, nor forsake us." Blessed is the man who can journey forward to eternal life with firm hope in the eternal love. May God grant you this blessedness. Recognize that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself. May the Lord, rich in grace and goodness, guide, bless, and crown you. Amen.

XXI.

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.—*Matthew 28, 20.*

A true union upon earth can never be formed by less than three; and this is especially true in regard to the union which is formed in matrimony. These three are, two human beings, and the Saviour. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Have you invited the Lord as a guest into your home, dearly beloved? He will gladly accept your invitation, for He has promised: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

He is with you with His counsel and advice. You may learn from Him your duties in the holy estate of matrimony; the duties of the husband in guiding and directing, of the wife in serving and obeying. You will learn from Him love and kindness, order and precision in the home, justice and truth in your daily life. His holy example, His precious Word will teach you all these things. Happy are you if thus you look up to Him, approach Him in prayer for and with one another, harken gladly to the proclamation of the Word.

He is with you also as the observer of your life and con-

duct. From men you can hide many secrets, but not from Him. His eyes look into the deepest recesses of the heart. Remember these words in the hour in which you will be tempted to do that which is wrong. The Holy Master knows what you ought to do and what you ought not to do. He sees when you allow the sun to go down upon your wrath. He sees when you mingle with the children of the world. He not only beholds these things, but is also present to set them right again and to give you strength to prove yourselves as His disciples. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." This is the secret of the Christian's strength.

He will be with you also in the dark valley. I am with you alway, even in evil days, in which husband and wife groan under the burden of the cross, when the one, though he himself be weak, must yet support and yet strengthen the other. Believe me, there is wonderful strength and comfort in the knowledge of our oneness with God through Christ. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

To-day perhaps these dark thoughts may scarcely enter into your soul. And yet, happy are you if even at this time you are prepared to meet the storms of life. Seasons of stress and trial often prove the faithfulness of your love. Thus then, dear friends, enter into this holy estate full of

confidence, do not forget to include the Master in the union of your hearts, and at all times join the poet as he sings:

O blest the house, the joys of which Thou sharest,
And never art forgot in scenes of joy;
O blest the house for whose sad wounds thou carest,
Where all the sick Thy healing power employ;
Until at last, the day's work fully ended,
All finally in joyful rapture fly
To that blest home to which Thou hast ascended,
Unto the blessed Father's house on high.
Amen.

XXII.

And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.—*John 2, 2.*

This is the only wedding of which we know, to which Jesus was invited and at which He was present. For us on this occasion it is sufficient to know that He has hallowed this and all weddings by His presence at Cana. In several places the Lord speaks of marriage and its bliss, and He gives us the assurance that He will sanctify all joys, and consequently also the joys of matrimony. Therefore we may know that, though He was personally present at only one wedding, He would like to attend all weddings, and rejoices even to-day if He receives an invitation. At all times He is willing to accept the invitation; and therefore we ought to say at this time, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest." Jesus will to-day be a witness, that He may hear the words of faith and love which you utter. He will be a witness in days to come, that He may behold your happy home life. He will be a constant witness, that He may behold how you are one in joy and sorrow, how you bear with and serve one another, how you order your ways according to His holy will. May the words of the poet be true in regard to your home also:

O blessed house that cheerfully receiveth
Thy visits, Jesus Christ, the soul's true Friend.

"And Jesus also was bidden." Jesus, who takes part in the joys of the wedding day, Himself brings true joy with Him. He is the sun and the delight of the heart. He is our Savior, we His children. United in Him we can gladly enter upon the holy estate of matrimony. Joy in Him and with Him is not merely a passing emotion, a fitful flame. What is the fruit of the so-called joys of the children of the world? Weariness and regret, sorrow and sadness. But where two rejoice in Jesus, and even in worldly, every-day joys, lift up their eyes to Him, there joy is not followed by sorrow, but is rather increased. There the words of Jesus are fulfilled: "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice and your joy no man taketh from you." Hallow then the joy of the wedding day and all the joys of your married life in the name of Jesus, and you will never experience the feeling of regret. On the contrary, you will at all times gratefully exclaim: Thank God, that we bade Jesus also to the marriage.

Jesus will increase your happiness, He will also help you to bear sorrow and transform it into joy. Bring all your afflictions, the great and the small, to the Lord in prayer. He is the true comforter in times of need; the true helper in the hours of affliction. Goodness and mercy shall follow the children of God all the days of their lives. In the hours of sorrow He reveals His love in a special degree. He has bought your souls with a price, with His precious blood, and therefore He wants them as His possession. The Lord has

granted you grace so that you may enter into the holy estate of marriage, not that through care and anxiety for the things of this world, through pleasure and enjoyment, you may hinder one another on the way of life, but that you may help and assist each other to gain life eternal. Viewed in the light of the eternal world, even the afflictions of life are joys, for they lead us nearer to the Lord.

Thus, then, whether you eat or drink, do it in the name of the Lord; whether you rest or labor, let it be in His name. May the Word of God, the house of the Lord, prayer and meditation be for you rays of light and of joy in Jesus, so that you may be able to say:

O blessed house the joys of which thou sharest,
And never art forgot in scenes of joy.

May Jesus from this festal day to which you have invited Him, be your guest and lead you on to the eternal day of joy, to which He invites us all. Amen.

XXIII.

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.—*Matthew 28, 20.*

How holy is this hour! Our hearts are filled with deep emotions. Longing and yet trembling, you have looked forward to the moment in which you should join your hands in an eternal union. Now that moment has arrived. Your loved ones in this holy hour lift up praying hands to heaven, and all their wishes are expressed in the prayer that the Lord may bless and keep you.

This interest of your friends in your future welfare must undoubtedly deeply move you, but it cannot satisfy you. Your hearts in this hour should not cling to this earth, but ascend to the fountain of all blessing, joy and peace. *We* can *wish* you much happiness, but we cannot *give* it to you. The Lord only can do this. Harken then to the words of the Savior:

Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world:

(1) I have been with you in the past;

(2) I am with you in this holy hour;

(3) I will be with you to all eternity.

1.

Beloved, the wedding day is, in the first place, a day of retrospection. As you look back into the past what do you

behold? You see a vast number of monuments—monuments of the goodness of the Lord. The inscription on one reads "Eben-Ezer," on another "Peniel," on a third one "Bethel," on a fourth one "Mahanaim," etc. The different monuments bear different inscriptions, but on all we see the same handwriting. These stones are testimonies of the grace and goodness of the Lord. Are your eyes opened so that you can behold these monuments? Ah, only too often the eyes of men are closed to these wonders. But in an hour like this, when hearts beat faster, and when we ascend the highest heights of happiness, we all can behold in our past life, spread out like a grand panorama, the marks of divine grace. And as we consider them, do we not feel like praising and glorifying the name of the Lord? True, our thanks are mingled with shame. You think of many hours of doubt, and faintheartedness, of the times when the proud heart presumed to know things better than the loving Father in heaven, when childlike confidence left your troubled soul. Yet this very shame is a stimulus to gratitude, for the better we realize how unworthy we are of the goodness of God, the more will we learn to be grateful.

2.

From the past we turn to the present. Can you not hear the voice of the Lord saying, "Lo, I am with you in this holy hour?" Can you not see Him at the same time

waiting for the vows of your soul? My dear friends, the joyful wedding day is a very solemn day. There is scarcely another day in the life of man which is of greater importance. We conclude the past, the curtain falls; a new scene begins, we enter upon a new period in our pilgrimage. You especially, dear sister, will notice this change. With this day you leave the home of your childhood with all its pleasures and all its happiness, to rule and to reign in a new home. You also, dear brother, will be confronted by new tasks and new duties, which perhaps will be more difficult than you have imagined.

What, then, is the duty of the Christian in an hour like this? To lift up his eyes toward heaven, and to vow: "O Lord, thou hast given me this maiden as a companion through life. I will prove my gratefulness to Thee by being faithful to her, by loving her with that love which never ceaseth, which is longsuffering and kind, which forgetteth itself and seeks its delight in the service of others."

And you, dear sister, should you not add to this vow: "Lord, I thank Thee for the companion through life whom Thou hast given me. I promise to look up to him in Thy fear, to learn from him, to fulfill my duties in the home, to love him with the same love which he offers me.

3.

If you have Him with you, all is well. He will hallow the hour of joy, and He will help you bear affliction, which

will come to your house also, since it walks from house to house and spares none. Does the burden of daily life rest heavily upon you, do you feel the curse resting upon the human race, do you have to eat your bread in the sweat of your brow, does life demand almost impossible things from you? Do not despair. He is with you, His rod and His staff shall comfort you.

Beloved, in this hour the Lord offers Himself to you as your companion. Receive Him, open wide the doors of your home, lift up the gates of your hearts, that He may enter. Who? The King of glory, the Fountain of love and grace, the Prince of life and peace. Amen.

XXIV.

Watch and pray,that ye enter not into temptation.—*Matthew 26, 41.*

In olden times it was customary to address to people who desired to enter into the holy estate of matrimony this question: "Have you approached the throne of God in prayer, so that you have the assurance of the divine blessing for the union of your hearts?" In many instances the answer was yes, when it ought to have been no. In our days this question is not asked, and yet it is true that if anyone desires a blessing for his marriage he must go to the Lord, he must speak with Him, and then be able gladly to say: Yes! I am certain, that we may assume these things of you. One would think, then, that all who have thus carefully examined themselves, would also at all times find joy and happiness in matrimony. But alas, we have in our hearts the old corrupt nature which constantly endeavors to destroy the good impulses of the soul. Therefore it is very necessary that, even after careful self-examination before the throne of God, we bear the words of the Master in mind: "Watch and pray."

Perhaps you think it might have been more befitting to select a passage of Holy Scripture for this occasion, which expressed joy and gladness. And yet, if you heed the words of our text, you will find this joy in heart and home. Love t is which unites you in this hour. The love which seeketh

not her own; which seeks its joy in the joy of the other; which can exercise self-denial, which can humble itself, bear and forbear. But, alas, hidden in our hearts, slumbers the proud and selfish nature. We all know what evil it can accomplish. Often it works exactly the opposite of that which we desire. This nature is in you also. Watch, therefore, examine yourselves, judge yourselves, be on your guard. Is it your desire that your love be not only a sentiment, but truth? Do you desire that the words of God be fulfilled in your lives also, that the husband should love his wife, the wife fearlessly fear the husband, then watch. In Mark we read: "And what I say, I say unto all, watch." To-day we say, "What I say, I say to you both, watch!"

At the same time we add, pray. When on this occasion you answer yes, you utter the first prayer. I am afraid that there are married people with whom it is at the same time their last prayer. I hope you will be instant in prayer. Do not cease to pray with and for one another. As long as this is done earnestly, there is no serious danger, for there is still love. Prayer unites hearts as nothing else upon earth, especially in times of affliction. We cannot promise that such times will not come during your life. Days of happiness should lead us to the Master, days which we call evil should unite us still closer with the Lord of grace. They will do it, if prayer be our pilot across the dark floods. Enter into matrimony with prayer. It gives you the assurance that God is a loving Father of all His children, that He will

never forsake them. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." He will grant us the desires of the heart, and especially the one thing which is needful. He will give us for our lives faith, through faith righteousness, through righteousness peace, through peace eternal life. Amen.

XXV.

A WIDOW.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.—*Jeremiah, 29, 11.*

It is your wish, dear friends, not to enter upon the holy estate of marriage without having the assurance that the Lord has placed His blessing upon the union of your hearts, so that the rays of divine love may accompany you on your journey through life, and that his faithfulness may be the rock upon which you shall safely build your home. If your hearts are thus filled with filial confidence, if your faith does not desire to undertake anything without having the assurance of divine assistance, then the Lord will not leave you in uncertainty and doubt. He will appear in your midst and say to you: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil."

That the Lord has thoughts of peace toward you, He has proved by His kind direction in the past. Though it devolves upon you now to undertake the journey of life together, to support yourselves by the labors of your hands, yet it is a beautiful thought, that the Lord has prepared a comfortable home for you, dear brother, so that you will not be compelled to worry for your daily bread, and for you,

dear sister, that He has given you again a strong support, so that you can place your cares and troubles upon the strong shoulders of your husband. It undoubtedly is a comforting thought for you, that after the many years of lonely widowhood, you have won again the heart of a man, who will be able to assist you with counsel and advice. The Lord knows the thoughts He thinks toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil. And if you undertake your pilgrimage in firm confidence upon the Lord, you will realize more and more, in the important as well as the unimportant affairs of life, that the Lord has only thoughts of peace with you.

Both of you have passed through much tribulation during your past lives. You, dear brother, have stood by the graves of your parents. You, dear sister, have learned early to bear the burdens of life. Only three years since you stood full of joy before the altar, to pledge matrimonial love to your departed husband. How many tears and sighs did those three years have in store for you. Ah, how your heart bled when you laid first your child into the cold grave, and then only a few months later saw your husband called to the eternal home.

At that time you found comfort in the words of the prophet: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil." Has not the Lord fulfilled this promise? Has He not been with you during the days of your widowhood? Though to-day we cannot lift

the veil which hides the future from our wondering eyes, yet you may rest assured that the Lord is the same yesterday, to-day and forever.

At the same time, though, we ought to remember that if the Lord gladly offers Himself as our counsellor and helper, we ought to conduct our lives in such manner that the Lord will be enabled to carry out His thoughts. Do you desire His blessing and His peace? Then you must daily ask for these precious gifts. Is it your wish that your house be a house of the Lord? Then you must conduct your lives according to the Word of God, so that all who enter into your home may recognize that the law of the Lord is the rule of your lives. Do you desire that the bond of love unite your hearts at all times? Then you must also learn patiently to bear with one another, and to assist each other on the path of life.

Enter then into this holy estate trusting in the Lord. Remember that it is your duty to lead one another heavenward. If to-day you accept the Lord through a firm and living faith, if you each will say with Jacob, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me," then you shall at all times experience the truth of the words: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil." Amen.

XXVI.

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.—*1 John, 4, 7–13.*

Hours come and go! Slowly they seem to approach, but soon they are gone. The happiest hours pass the most quickly. The same is true also in regard to this solemn and holy hour, to which you have looked forward with longing, and yet also with a certain degree of sadness; this hour which is of such great importance for your future life; this hour in which your loved ones join with you in the prayer: "Lord, bless the coming in and the going out." If, while contemplating the goodness of the Lord in the past, you exclaim: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits," then you will also feel a desire, while looking forward into the future, to pray: "Abide with us, Lord Jesus. We will not let Thee go, except Thou bless us." True, life at this moment lies before you suffused with heavenly light, and all care and anxiety are forgotten. Yet is it impossible to banish all sad and solemn thoughts and emotions. Let us then turn to the divine sun of righteousness. Let us open our hearts to the rays of love proceeding from it. Let us direct our souls heavenward with the prayer, that His Word may also in the future be a light unto our feet and a lamp on

our path. His word will show us that our love can have the right foundation only as it is based upon the love of God. In it we behold:

(1) The true source of love;
(2) The true test for love;
(3) The true happiness of love.

1.

"Love is of God," thus the apostle John exclaims. Whatever true and genuine love is found in this world, springs forth from the fountain of divine love. Ask a happy bridal couple: Does not love often have its origin and source in this world? Have not many happy marriages resulted from a love which originated within the heart of man and from there flowed into the home? Beloved, many streams of love have flowed through the world, but many of them have also been polluted and made turbid by human selfishness and passion. How many things in this world are called love! And yet earthly love is only a gay outward garment. No, no, genuine love, that which makes this earth a paradise, and matrimony the fore-court of heaven, which ennobles and elevates man and fills his soul with unspeakable joy, this love is of God. All the scattered drops of love, all the thousands of rivers of love upon earth which have and always will refresh your souls, spring forth from the fountain of love in heaven, which is God. If this fountain is exhausted for us,

then we perish like the wilting flower. If it constantly bubbles forth for us, it will make the sickly well, the sorrowing rejoicing, the burdened light-hearted. Therefore hasten to this fountain. The love of God has called you into existence, protected you in the days of your youth, upheld you all the days of your life. In love God has led you together, and says to you at this holy moment: Give Me your hearts. If you harken to Him, then the bond of love which at this time unites your hands and hearts will remain firm and indissoluble. Yea, should your love ever be in danger of failing, God's love will strengthen it again. May that love be the foundation of your marriage, the source of your love. That love of God which gave the greatest of all gifts to the children of men, which sent the only-begotten Son into the world, that love impels us to love one another. "If we love one another. God dwelleth in us." This is the test of love.

2.

If the fountain of love has flowed into our selfish hearts, new life and new love will spring up in them. Ah, how necessary it is that day after day we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, be delivered from all selfishness, and filled with the love "which is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Many times will come in your married life, when it will be necessary to give proof of your love. On the wedding day, when the hearts of bride and groom are filled

with love, it seems so unnecessary to remind them to be true to one another. And yet, let me implore you never to forget the words of the apostle John: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." During the years of your married life you will notice defects and faults in one another, which your eye of love had overlooked. Then it becomes our duty to bear and to forbear, to forgive and to forget, not only to take, but also to give, not only to rest, but also to serve and to sacrifice.

You, dear brother, will from now on have a companion through life who is not accustomed to the luxuries of wealth, but who has been surrounded by the love of her parents, brothers and sisters, and who therefore is accustomed to breathe the atmosphere of love. Prove to her by the strength and kindness, the unchangeableness and firmness of your love, that it has been lighted from the altar fires of God's love.

Your, dear sister, have in the future the one noble and grand task to become one with your husband in faithful love. The love of a woman is weak and tender, sensitive and changeable, if it is based only upon the passing emotions of the heart. But it is precious and strong, if it is given of God, if it is constantly nourished by prayer and the Word of God.

3.

Finally, let me say a few words in regard to the true happiness of love. "If we love one another, God dwelleth in

us, and His love is perfected in us." Of the stream which went forth from the garden of Eden we read: "The name of the first is Pison, where there is gold." The stream of God bears the precious gold of true happiness. If then you can truly say: "God with us and we with Him," then you will rest securely, even amid the storms of life.

Sadness fills your heart, dear sister, as you depart from the home of your childhood. What will the future have in store? What will life bring? How many of the hopes which fill your soul in this hour will be fulfilled? We need not worry. All care and anxiety is transformed by the words: "God dwelleth in us." You have the best dowry, faith in the love of the Lord. Trusting in His love you will be able to establish a new Eden upon earth, so that the words of Revelation will be fulfilled: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them and they shall be His people, and God himself shall be with them, and He shall be their God." Blessed happiness.

Enter Thou into the hearts of these Thy people, O faithful God. Fill them with divine strength. Pour Thy love, Thy very heart into their hearts, that they may be Thy temple, until Thou shalt bring them also into Thy sanctuary above, where it shall be proved that love is stronger than death, that it abideth forever. Amen.

XXVII.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in.—*Psalm 24, 7–9.*

"Behold thy King cometh unto thee," these words of Scripture are appropriate, not only during the holy season of Advent, but on every Sabbath day, and at all special times in the life of man. The Heavenly King, Jesus Christ, would gain entrance into your hearts, my dear friends. He knocks at the doors of your hearts, and would be the third one in your union. The doors of your home on this festal day are opened wide to receive all the guests. Will you not open the doors of your heart also to receive the chief Guest, of whom the psalmist says: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." We ask: "Who is this King of glory?" and receive the answer: "The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle."

Let this King of glory enter into your hearts and your home.

(1) He brings love and peace;

(2) He brings help and blessing.

1.

It was love which brought Christ into the world. He had compassion on the children of men, who were groaning in the fetters of sin, death and the devil. They must be won again for their rightful ruler, they should live under Him in the realms of peace. His love brings Him to you also. He is powerful enough to win your hearts and to place into them as His gifts, love and peace. The love of two people is a precious thing, but even the holiest human love must be sanctified. Husband and wife love each other truly only if they both are filled with the love of Christ. The Lord must give them strength to humble and to submit themselves, to rival each another, not in claims and demands, but in serving love, which seeketh not her own, and which never ceaseth. To this love the Lord adds peace, so that you may spend your life in harmony and unity. Yea, He gives you that peace which the world can neither give nor take away from you—the peace of a heart reconciled with God.

2.

Wealth and worldly possessions, strength and endurance, help us to overcome many obstacles, but not all. During the lives of even the wealthiest men, there come times when they are at a loss what to do, when men cannot help them. Blessed is the man who at such times seeks his help in the

Lord. He can help in the hour in which human help is of no avail. He is Lord even over the storms of life. He is able to change sorrow into joy. He will give you that blessing upon which everything depends. Do not imagine that you can accomplish everything in your own strength. Blessings can be obtained only by prayer. The Lord alone can give them. He is able to multiply your possessions, and to give you a rich reward for your faithful labors. He gives to His children divine blessings for heart and home. Let this King of glory enter as a guest into your home. He is the truest friend, the mightiest support. Amen.

L OF C.

XXVIII.

Delight thyself also in the Lord: and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.—*Psalm 37, 4.*

Dearly beloved, you purpose in this hour to establish a home, and for this important step you need a great deal of advice. You consult your relatives and friends, you also seek counsel of your own hearts. Yet the best advice you seek and find is in the holy temple of the Lord, where the founder of matrimony himself speaks to you, admonishing and at the same time promising. You hear—

(1) The admonition: Delight thyself also in the Lord;

(2) The promise: And He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

1.

"Delight thyself also in the Lord." This signifies that you should think and speak as did Joshua: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Your home should be a house of God, and you yourselves should constantly strive to lead a holy life. Blessed is the home where Christ is a guest. This cannot be said of all homes, though their inmates at some time may have promised faithfulness to the Lord. May you never forget the vows of this holy hour.

Is it so very difficult to fulfill the demands of the Lord? Certainly not for you. For you must gratefully confess that

God has graciously led you in the past. You cannot but exclaim: "I delight myself in the Lord." Your past life has been illumined by the rays of God's grace, so that you should the more gladly heed the admonition of this hour.

Establish your home upon the true foundation, Jesus Christ. Approach the throne of God frequently in prayer; harken diligently to the Word of God, so that all men may see that it is your desire to lead one another to the eternal home. This is possible only as husband and wife are united in the one thing which is needful.

2.

Such a union has also the promise: "And he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Married people have many desires. Their hearts long for love and peace, for health and happiness, for joy and blessing. They hope that in joy and sorrow their hearts will be united, and that the God of grace will always lead them with His counsel.

This is an abundance of desires, which, however, are all warranted. Will they all be fulfilled? The Lord promises: "I will give thee the desires of thine heart." How gracious and comforting! All the desires of a God-fearing heart shall be satisfied. And if at any time a wish should not be fulfilled, ask yourselves the question: Was it a wish according to the will of God? And further: Would its fulfillment have brought a blessing to us?

May the God of all grace guide and direct you. Amen.

INDEX OF SCRIPTURE TEXTS TREATED.

		Page.
I	Amos 3, 3	3
II	1 Peter 4, 10	6
III	Romans 12, 12	10
IV	Psalm 84, 11	15
V	Colossians 3, 14	19
VI	1 Chronicles 17, 26–27	22
VII	Matthew 7, 24–27	28
VIII	Luke 10, 38–42	32
IX	Isaiah 61, 6	36
X	Joshua 24, 15	39
XI	John 20, 19	42
XII	1 Chronicles 17, 27	45
XIII	Colossians 3, 14	47
XIV	Genesis 32, 26, A Pastor	50
XV	Ruth 1, 16, 17	54
XVI	Ruth 1, 16, 17, A Pastor	58
XVII	Psalm 119, 105	62
XVIII	Psalm 71, 7–9, A Golden Wedding	65
XIX	1 Corinthians 13, 13	70
XX	Psalm 4, 3	73
XXI	Matthew 28, 20	76
XXII	John 2, 2	79

XXIII	Matthew 28, 20	82
XXIV	Matthew 26, 41	86
XXV	Jeremiah 29, 11, A Widow	89
XXVI	1 John 4, 7–13	92
XXVII	Psalm 24, 7–9	97
XXVIII	Psalm 37, 4	100

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